

the ball is thrown."

Other refinements include making more use of audio opportunities to capture, for example, an outfielder crashing into a wall or the collision at home plate between a diving runner and a waiting catcher.

Goren says that some enhancements would require cooperation from the league, such as the miking of players to capture, say, the conversation between the runner at first and the first baseman. Goren also says he'd like to be able to film the warm-up routine that some designated hitters go through the inning before they bat, often in a batting

cage under the stands.

Fox Sports also is producing two pregame shows tied to baseball. The first will lead out of the Saturday morning cartoon block and will be targeted to kids (and hosted by kids), designed to teach them about the game and its personalities. The second half-hour pregame show will be tied more directly to that day's games.

"Everything we're doing, from the promos on, is to expose the game to a whole new audience—a younger audience that has left baseball. The traditional audience will be there," says Goren.

NBC focuses on All-Star, postseason play

Meanwhile, NBC also is spending a sizable amount (\$475 million) for a five-year package that includes three All-Star Games, two World Series, half of each season's League Championship Series and three divisional play-off games each season.

But without a regular-season slate of games and with several big sports events on its plate (NBA playoffs, Wimbledon and the Atlanta Olympics), NBC is less focused now on baseball than is Fox. At press time, NBC Sports executives weren't ready to talk about their plans for MLB coverage. ■

Baseball ad sales back in the swing

After last season's disappointing sales, advertisers are returning, slowly in some cases

By Jim McConville

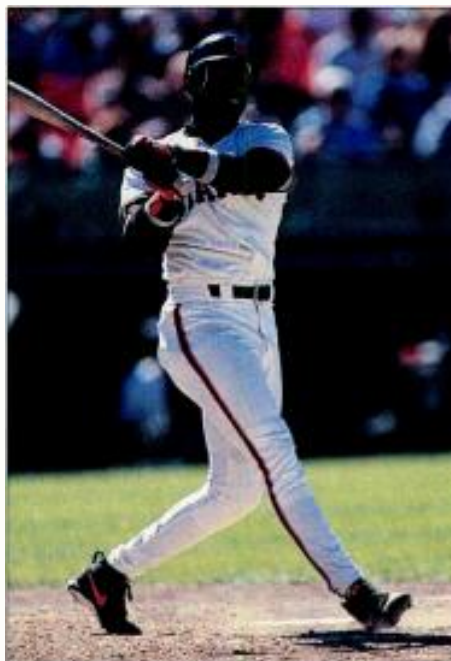
Most Major League Baseball local rightsowners say they are singing a happier—albeit cautious—tune this year about ad sales for the 1996 baseball season.

Broadcast stations, for the most part, say baseball ad sales are making an about-face after last year's disastrous season, in which sales were down 15%-25% by midseason. But for other rightsholders, baseball is anything but a financial field of dreams.

For the Milwaukee Brewers, which two years ago took the team's broadcast rights in-house from Milwaukee-based WTVT(TV), rights sales are up 20% over last year, says Mitch Nye, vice president of broadcast sales for the Brewers.

"We're starting to get some advertisers back that last year shied away from the whole thing," says Nye, adding that local ad sales are up slightly, while national sales are about even. "The healing process is taking place, but it's slow."

At KIRO-TV Seattle, which will carry 40 Seattle Mariners games this year, ad sales are up 20% over 1995, says KIRO-TV General Manager Sandy Zogg. The



KTVU(TV) San Francisco, which carries Barry Bonds and the Giants, is looking forward to record sales figures.

reason: "The Mariners last year won the American League West pennant, and advertisers now view local advertising as a good buy."

Jeff Block, station manager for KTVU(TV) San Francisco, which owns

broadcast rights for 59 San Francisco Giants games, says the station may actually post record sales figures in 1996.

"We will begin the season with more money on the books than we ended the season with last year," says Block. "Basically, we had almost nothing on our [ad sales] books this time last year."

Rich Deutch, general manager, KSMO-TV Kansas City, Mo., which will cover 55 Kansas City Royals games, says ad sales are up 80% over budget. "We've gotten more two-year and multiyear buyers than in the past," Deutch says.

Group W's WJZ-TV Baltimore, which splits TV rights with regional sports network Home Team Sports and sells space for 35 Baltimore Orioles games, says advance sales are running well ahead of last year. "It will be profitable for WJZ," says the station's general manager, Marcellus Alexander.

Other TV rightsholders say MLB still looks like a losing proposition. One general manager who declined to be identified says his station will be "hard-pressed to make baseball profitable this year."

"It's what you would call a loss leader," says Prime Sports GM Bill Craig of Prime's \$3 million-a-year-deal with the Pittsburgh Pirates.

To make money, Craig says, Prime Sports, which reaches 2.2 million cable homes, must sell at least \$68,000 of advertising for each of its planned 60 telecasts. That would cover the per-game rights cost (\$50,000) and production costs (\$18,000).

Even if it manages to sell out (56

Continues on page 32
Local rights chart on pages 30-31

The local TV and radio lineup

BROADCAST TV						CABLE				RADIO			
Team	Flagship	#of reg. season games	# of stations in net.	Contract status yr./yrs.	1996 rights (in millions)	Regional network	#of reg. season games	Contract status yr./yrs.	1996 rights (in millions)	Flagship	# of stations in net.	Contract status yr./yrs.	1996 rights (in millions)
NATIONAL LEAGUE EAST													
Atlanta Braves	WTBS (TV) (ch.17)	125	0	NA	NA	SportsSouth	24	NA	NA	WSB(AM) (750 khz)	164	2/5	\$3.0
Team, WTBS and SportsSouth are owned by Turner Broadcasting System.													
Florida Marlins	WBFS-TV (ch.33)	50	6	4/4	\$6.7	Sunshine Network	60	4/4	\$3.7	WQAM(AM) 560khz	24	4/4	\$2.2
Montreal Expos	SRC(Fr.)	20	12	2/4	NA	RDS	40	1/4	\$1.1	CKAC (AM)	25	2/4	NA
	TQS (Eng.)	20	7	2/4		TSN	25			CIBC (AM)	6	2/4	
Team retains broadcast TV and radio rights. Estimated TV revenue: \$2.6 million; estimated radio revenue: \$900,000													
New York Mets	WWOR-TV (ch.9)	77	0	5/5	NA	SportsChannel New York	75	10/30	\$13	WFAN (AM) (660 khz)	23	1/2	\$5.5
Team and WWOR-TV have revenue-sharing partnership.													
Philadelphia Phillies	WPHL-TV (ch.17)	84	2	4/5	NA	PRISM	42	4/5	NA	WGMP (AM) (1210khz)	20	4/5	\$3.0
						SportsChan./Phil.	25						
Team and WPHL-TV have partnership. They produce and sell games for broadcast and cable TV, retaining all advertising revenue.													
NATIONAL LEAGUE CENTRAL													
Chicago Cubs	WGN-TV (ch.9)	140	0	NA	NA	Chicagoland	10	NA	NA	WGN(AM) (720 khz)	54	NA	NA
Team, WGN-AM-TV and Chicagoland are owned by Tribune Co.													
Cincinnati Reds	WSTR-TV (ch.64)	46	4	1/3	NA	SportsChannel Cincinnati	50	1/3	\$4.5	WLW (AM) (700 khz)	73	2/3	NA
Sports Channel holds all TV rights, buys time on TV stations.													
Houston Astros	KTXH (TV) (ch.20)	50+	8-10	9/10	<\$5.0	Prime Sports	75	11/15	\$4.0	KILT (AM) (610 khz)	50+	1/3	NA
Team retains radio rights; estimated radio revenue: \$3.5-4 million													
Pittsburgh Pirates	WPXI (TV) (ch.11)	15	0	1/1	NA	Prime Sports	60	1/3	\$3.0	KDKA (AM) (1020 khz)	51	1/1	NA
St. Louis Cardinals	KPLR-TV (ch.11)	60	21	2/3+1	NA	Prime Sports	40	3/3	NA	KMOX (AM) (1120khz)	120	5/5	NA
Team owner Anheuser-Bush produces all games, splits TV revenues with KPLR-TV; sells radio inventory to KMOX. Team is being sold.													
NATIONAL LEAGUE WEST													
Colorado Rockies	KWGN-TV (ch.2)	96	12	4/5	NA	NO CABLE	—	—	—	KOA (AM) (850 khz)	54	4/8	\$4.0
Team retains broadcast TV rights.													
Los Angeles Dodgers	KTLA (TV) (ch.5)	46	0	4/5	\$15.5	NO CABLE	—	—	—	KABC (AM) (790 khz)	26	4/5	\$5.0
San Diego Padres	KFMB-TV (ch.8)	55	1	2/3	\$2.0	Prime Sports	40	3/5	\$1.2	KFMB (AM) (760 khz)	2	2/3	\$2.0
San Francisco Giants	KTVU (TV) (ch.2)	57	5	2/6	\$5.5	SportsChannel Pacific	55	7/7	\$4.2	KNBR (AM) (680 khz)	17	2/5	\$4.5
Team retains seven 30-second spots per game on broadcast TV, is negotiating multi-year extension with SportsChannel.													

Cover Story

Baseball 1996

BROADCAST TV						CABLE				RADIO			
Team	Flagship	# of reg. season games	# of stations in net.	Contract status yr./yrs.	1996 rights (in millions)	Regional network	# of reg. season games	Contract status yr./yrs.	1996 rights (in millions)	Flagship	# of stations in net.	Contract status yr./yrs.	1996 rights (in millions)
AMERICAN LEAGUE EAST													
Baltimore Orioles	WJZ-TV (ch. 13)	35	12	3/3	NA	Home Team Sports	81	3/3	\$10.25	WBAL(AM) (1090 khz)	29	3/3	\$2.5
HTS and WJZ-TV are both owned by Westinghouse. HTS holds all TV rights and has internal agreement with WJZ-TV. WJZ-TV buys time on WNUV-TV Baltimore to air additional 35 games.													
Boston Red Sox	WABU(TV) (ch.68)	75	11	1/1	\$9.0	New England Sports Network	76	14/20	\$6.0	WEEI(AM) 850 khz	60	3/4	\$4-4.8
Cable rights fee depends on number of subscribers.													
Detroit Tigers	WKBD-TV (ch.50)	56	6	2/5	NA	PASS Sports	70	Through 1999	NA	WJR (AM) (760 khz)	32	1/5	NA
Team buys time on WKBD-TV, retains ad inventory except eight 30-second spots; team retains radio rights.													
New York Yankees	WPIX-TV (ch.11)	50	0	3/3	NA	Madison Square Garden Network	102	8/12	\$49.5	WABC (AM) (770 khz)	15+	10/10	\$5.5
MSG Network, which holds all TV rights, shares revenue with WPIX-TV; station produces games, MSG sells ads.													
Toronto Blue Jays	Baytone CBC	35 26	21 35	4/5	\$9.0	The Sports Network	80	3/3	\$5-6	CJCL (AM) (590 khz)	45	4/6	\$1.6
AMERICAN LEAGUE CENTRAL													
Chicago White Sox	WGN-TV (ch.9)	58	0	2/3	NA	SportsChannel Chicago	93	13/17	\$4.5	WMVP (AM) (1000 khz)	28	1/5	\$3.5
Team and WGN-TV have revenue-sharing deal; team also entering third season of partnership with Spanish language WIND(AM)													
Cleveland Indians	WUAB(TV) (ch.43)	70	4	1/3	NA	SportsChannel Ohio	66	1/3	NA	WKNR (AM) (1220 khz)	35	3/3	NA
Kansas City Royals	KSMO-TV (ch.62)	55	13	1/3	<\$3.0	NO CABLE	—	—	—	WIBW (AM) (580 khz)	106	2/3	\$1.8
Milwaukee Brewers	WVTV(TV) (ch.18)	66	4	1/1	NA	NO CABLE	—	—	—	WTMJ (AM) (620 khz)	57	1/5	NA
Team retains broadcast TV and radio rights. Cable deal with Group W Satellite Communications under negotiation.													
Minnesota Twins	WCCO-TV (ch.4)	41	0	3/4	NA	Midwest SportsChannel	75 basic 20 PPV	3/4	NA	WCCO (AM) (830 khz)	59	3/4	NA
CBS/Westinghouse holds all rights, owns WCCO-AM-TV and Midwest Sports. WCCO-AM-TV has agreement with KLGT-TV, which carries nine additional games.													
AMERICAN LEAGUE WEST													
California Angels	KCAL(TV) (ch.9)	52	0	1/5	NA	Prime Sports West	34	3/5	NA	KMPC (AM) (710 khz)	13	2/2	\$3.7
Disney is negotiating to sell KCAL and to buy interest in Angels.													
Oakland Athletics	KRON-TV (ch.4)	35	10	4/5	\$5.3	SportsChannel Pacific	55	1/5	<\$5.3	KFRC (AM) (610 khz)	18	3/4	NA
Team retains radio rights; estimated revenue \$4-5 million													
Seattle Mariners	KIRO-TV (ch.7)	58	7	2/3	NA	Prime Sports Northwest	51	3/3	NA	KIRO (AM) (710 khz)	30	4/5	NA
Texas Rangers	KXTX-TV KXAS-TV	123 15	20	1/4	\$7.0	NO CABLE	—	—	—	KRLD (AM) (1080 khz)	56+	2/5	\$3.0

Chart shows rights fees that teams will receive this season for straight sale of rights to broadcast stations or cable networks.

NA—indicates that terms of rights deals were not available or not applicable—that is, team retains rights or is otherwise involved in production and sale of telecasts and/or radio broadcasts.

AD SALES *Continued from page 28*

spots) every game at rate-card prices (roughly \$1,100 per 30-second spot), it will fall short of breaking even. And Craig expects to sell only about 70% of the inventory.

All told, Prime Sports will lose between \$1.8 million and \$2 million on the Pirates. But that's OK, Craig says. The Pirates anchor the network's sports offerings during the summer; they are what keeps cable subscribers happy and what keeps cable operators paying Prime Sports's affiliate fee—90

cents per subscriber per month.

"Last year was a disaster for this station, and this year the jury is still out," says Bill Ballard, vice president and general manager of WBFS-TV Miami, which will carry 52 Florida Marlins games.

"Last year was so bad that things have to be better, but when you compare it with previous years, it's a different story," says Ballard. "We're still trying to get back to that point; we're not there yet."

The bottom line for making a profit depends on what team is on the field, Ballard says. "The upfront is better than

last year, but if they're 20 games out of it by mid-June, we're in trouble."

MLB station rights that changed hands over the winter include WABU-TV, which takes over the Boston Red Sox broadcasts for WSBK-TV. The station will telecast 75 regular-season games.

Other broadcast rights swaps: the Cincinnati Reds shifted its roughly 50 WLWT-TV telecasts to Sports Channel Cincinnati, which now will carry all Reds games, and the California Angels which shifted approximately 45 broadcasts from KTLA-TV to Disney-owned KCAL-TV. ■

ESPN makes it to the playoffs

Cable network adds postseason coverage to its lineup

By Jim McConville

ESPN kicks off its seventh year of Major League Baseball coverage with one dramatic difference: postseason play.

This year ESPN will cover, as part of its estimated \$455 million five-year MLB rights package signed last November, six to 12 games in the first-round divisional playoff series not shown by Fox or NBC. The cable network plans to televise two day games during the series.

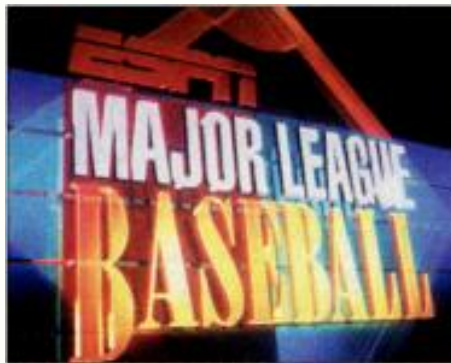
This year also marks the final year that ESPN will have exclusive cable rights to MLB telecasts.

Next year Liberty Media/Fox Sports will air games as part of its \$43 million a year nonexclusive MLB cable rights package. Liberty will telecast two regular-season weeknight games for three years over its network of regional sports channels.

Besides playoff games, ESPN again will cover roughly 75 games with its Sunday and Wednesday night double-header telecasts (26 Sunday and 49 Wednesday games). The network will supplement regular weekly coverage with Memorial Day, Labor Day and Fourth of July games.

ESPN opens its season March 31 with Sunday night coverage of the Chicago White Sox vs. Seattle Mariners game at 9 p.m. ET.

ESPN executives are cautiously optimistic that 1996 will produce a different ratings story than 1995, when



This year, ESPN baseball coverage will include post-season play.

fans vented anger over the 1994 players strike by boycotting baseball parks and turning off TV sets. ESPN scored a 1.8 average Nielsen rating for 1995, down from a 1.9 in 1994.

"Clearly, last year was a difficult time," says John Wildhack, ESPN senior vice president, programming. "But I think there's some momentum now, and the healing process is well under way."

To restore viewer interest, ESPN has developed two promotional campaigns. The first, "It's Baseball and You're an American," uses 15 promo spots that feature *NYPD Blue* actor Nick Turturro and an actor portraying Abe Lincoln pushing baseball as America's pastime. The spots began March 22.

Along with weekly baseball coverage, ESPN resumes *Baseball Tonight*, its daily sports news show with announcer Chris Berman, anchors Karl

Ravech and Gary Miller and analysts Peter Gammons and Dave Campbell. The show airs live Sunday evening before *Sunday Night Baseball* and every day—except Wednesday—at 10:30 p.m. and midnight.

"*Baseball Tonight* has been a staple and will continue to be," says Wildhack. "We feel the franchise of *Baseball Tonight* and production values of our *Sunday Night* package are as good as any in the industry."

ESPN's *Sunday Night Baseball* announcing team again will be Jon Miller, play-by-play, and Joe Morgan, analyst. Berman returns as ESPN's Wednesday night play-by-play commentator, and Gammons again will be studio analyst on *Baseball Tonight*. This year ESPN adds Dan Shulman, who will split play-by-play duties with Berman on Wednesday night.

Jeffrey Mahl, the network's senior vice president of ad sales, says 1996 is shaping up to be a better year than 1995: "Last year we had a pretty good success with baseball upfront. We haven't started upfront for 1996-97, where we will be selling playoff baseball for the first time. We look forward to expanding on it."

Mahl says ESPN promotes its other baseball sports programming when selling ad time. "We hope to take advantage of the fact that we have a sustaining baseball effort," he says. "We've been able to package baseball with some of the branded ESPN programming, specifically *Baseball Tonight*." ■